

Case Management/Electronic Case Files (CM/ECF)

In 1996 the federal courts began the development of a new case management system that contains an electronic case file capability. The goal of the case management/electronic case files (CM/ECF) project, which is one of the largest and most complex automation initiatives the judiciary has ever undertaken, is to create a system that allows nearly all documents associated with a court case to be handled electronically. This project has made significant progress and has advanced to the point the Administrative Office of the United States Courts will begin the last wave of implementation for the U.S. District Courts in March, 2004. The Eastern and Western Districts of Arkansas will participate in this ten month implementation phase that will not be completed until January 2005.

The CM/ECF systems will provide the federal courts with next-generation, electronic case file capabilities which include:

- Electronic submission of case file documents (via Internet for attorneys)
- Realtime reports, queries, and docket sheets
- Management of electronic documents (including storage, security and archiving)
- Automatic generation of docket entries from electronic filings
- Electronic notices of filing to other CM/ECF participants
- Electronic retrieval of case documents (including public Internet access).

The CM/ECF design provides for low-cost user access to the system. Any modern personal computer with Internet access and web browser software (Netscape or Internet Explorer) can access case files. Retrieving electronically filed documents requires the Adobe Acrobat PDF Reader software (or equivalent) which is available at no cost from Adobe over the Internet. Anticipated benefits of CM/ECF for the attorneys include:

- No couriers, no postage
- Immediate Internet access to court records from any location
- Automatic notice and service to other parties
- 24 hour/7 day access and filing capability

Information concerning CM/ECF is maintained on the court's web site at www.are.uscourts.gov. The section includes information about the program, frequently asked questions and answers, as well as a video that explains the attorney's role and how this new system impacts the bar. Additionally, training opportunities for the bar will be posted on this site.